

To the Members of the California State Assembly:

Assembly Bill 774 reflects a multi-year, collaborative effort by consumers, patients, hospitals, and health care associations to ensure low-income Californians who are uninsured or have inadequate insurance have access to hospital services at discounted prices. This bill will provide relief to families and individuals by ensuring patients receive information about public health insurance, charity care and discount programs, have access to significant discounts, and are given a reasonable time to begin paying their hospital bill before their credit is impacted or they face litigation. Low-income patients will no longer face wages garnishment or liens placed on their primary residence as part of a hospital's collection efforts.

Across the nation, individuals, employers and government are confronting the challenges to the rising cost of health care services. I am concerned that without significant changes, health care will become even less affordable. Affordability is the key to quality, access and coverage. In California, we are making progress in improving access to services and making health care more affordable. We will soon offer low-income Californians and seniors relief from the rising costs of prescription drugs through AB 2911 (Nunez) which creates a new drug discount program. Through AB 774, eligible Californians will have access to more affordable hospital services and be given greater information about health coverage options, in recognition that affordability is the key to coverage. With my partners in the Legislature, I look forward in 2007 to working to develop a comprehensive and systemic framework that advances the principle of shared responsibility among individuals, employers and government to promote an affordable, accessible and quality health care system.

For these reasons, I am pleased to sign AB 774.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger